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Veils: Truth in Translation

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Art and Design

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Fine Arts in Studio Art

by

Katherine Block

August 2015

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ABSTRACT

Veils: Truth in Translation

by

Katherine M. Block

This supporting document for the thesis exhibition entitled “Veils: Truth in Translation” will discuss Block’s exploration of painting during her time at East Tennessee State University. The supporting document also provides the historical background and influences which have contributed to Block's overall process and techniques. These influences include the Abstract Expressionists, Carl Jung, Ferdinand de Saussure, John Dewey, Theodor Adorno, Joan Mitchell and Gerhard Richter. In the supporting document Block probes the idea that non-objective painting is more than a language confined by linguistic elements of sign, signifier, and signified, but is a process of thinking, which is communicated on a higher level of perception than verbal speech or visual symbolism. Block will discuss how she translates experiences from the metaphysical realm of feeling and thought to the physical reality of paint and surface which communicates the experience to the viewer.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my Mother, Katherine Goodwin Maycann

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I would like to acknowledge several people who have been influential in my growth as an artist. First and foremost I would like to thank Robert Block, my significant other, without whose help, love and support, I would not have completed my MFA with such ease. He has provided me with a sense of love and joy no other person can.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

After a successful career in nursing, I decided to return to school to obtain my degree in art. Using my creative abilities had always been a pleasure of mine and pursuing something for which I had a passion seemed like the right thing to do, if I wanted to be true to myself. I completed a BFA from University of Tennessee at Chattanooga over the course of six years while working and going to school. Several years later, when the opportunity was right, I decided to go to graduate school for my Masters in Fine Arts. I wanted to spend the rest of my life working and living in an environment of art making and dialogue.

During my undergraduate program, I was introduced to the Abstract Expressionists. I was interested in their association with the Jungian concept of the collective unconscious (Sandler 23). Jung explains that we all have a pre-existent unconscious which is universal and is the source of forms and archetypes (Jung 99). Jung further explains the existence of these forms in his book *Man and His Symbols*:

“What we properly call instincts are physiological urges, and are perceived by the senses. But at the same time they also manifest themselves in fantasies and often reveal their presence only by symbolic images. These manifestations are what I call the archetypes. They are without known origin; and they reproduce themselves in any time or in any part of the world” (Jung “*Man and His Symbols*” 31).

Many of the Abstract Expressionists were in search of these archetype forms. It was through the use of intuition and automatic painting that some felt they had found archetypal, universal, forms. According to Irving Sandler, John Graham introduced Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Adolph Gottlieb to Jungian ideas through the publication of his book *Systems and Dialectics of Art*, in 1937 (Sandler 21). “Given [Graham’s] interest in tapping unconscious imagery, it is natural that Graham in his book

should have stressed the importance of automatic writing and directed Gorky, De Kooning, Rothko, Gottlieb, and Pollock to that Surrealist technique” (Sandler 23). Robert Motherwell was also influenced by the idea of the collective unconscious and the use of automatism to connect to it. Motherwell, though, was introduced to the ideas through Roberto Matta, a Chilean-born Surrealist (Terenzio 4). It was actually the experience with Matta which created the painter, Robert Motherwell. Terenzio summarizes:

“...there can be no doubt that this surrealist technique for inciting the imagination was the catalyst for many influences converging to strengthen the young man’s resolve. Still, it is the bare fact of the decision itself (confirmed by a lifelong constancy to it) which reveals that in the act of painting Motherwell had tapped something deeper, truer, and more compelling than anything he had previously known. In existential terms, one could say that through his newly found medium, he had realized himself at the center of his own being, indivisible in purpose” (Terenzio 4).

Motherwell would use this technique to connect to his own inner self. He was not as interested in the appearance of primordial forms. On the contrary, Gottlieb and Rothko were attracted to ancient myths and primitive art and began to paint myth inspired pictures around 1942, specifically, Gottlieb’s “Pictograph,” 1946 and Rothko’s “Baptismal Scene,” 1945 (Sandler 63-64). In relation to my own process, I am more concerned with the expression of my inner feelings and ideas. I am not looking to ancient myths and primitive art to be inspired to paint. Ultimately, the tools of automatic writing and meditation lead to a more wholly developed process of painting.

The idea of investigating the interior self grew more pervasive within the New York School community. There was also an expansion of the ideas from one of searching for an archetype to one of expressing personal experiences. De Kooning declared:

“Painting isn’t just the visual thing that reaches your retina – it’s what is behind it and in it. I’m not interested in “abstracting” or taking things out or reducing painting to design, form, line and color. I paint this way because I can keep putting more and more things into it – drama, anger, pain, love, a figure, a horse, and my ideas about space. Through your eyes it again becomes an emotion or an idea. It doesn’t matter if it’s different from mine as long as it comes from the painting which has its own integrity and intensity” (Sandler 92).

With the emphasis shifting from symbol to non-representation, the ground was fertile for Pollock to create his drip paintings. Additionally, this shift fine-tuned the attitude toward the process of painting.

Mark Rothko describes it this way:

Neither the action nor the actors (-ire., shapes) can be anticipated, or described in advance. They begin as an unknown adventure in an unknown space. It is at the moment of completion that in a flash of recognition they seem to have the quality and function which was intended. Ideas and plans that existed in the mind at the start were simply the doorway through which one left the world in which they occur (Foster 44).

These ideas and the culture of trusting your inner self to reveal inspiration provided for the confident execution of a piece. This is how I wanted to paint; connected to the collective unconscious and following my intuitive impulses, while at the same time standing on a firm ground of historical and theoretical understanding. I have come full circle back to these beginning ideas resting on the shoulders of the Abstract Expressionists.

When starting my Master's program, my initial ideas stemmed from the premise that painting has a language. Prior to coming to East Tennessee State University, I was introduced to Ferdinand de Saussure's "General Linguistics" and was interested in his system of sign-signifier-signified. His theory that language was the sum of a sound, signifier, representing an object or idea, together with the addition of a cognitive concept, signified, about that object or idea created a sign. This sign being the sum total of the sound and the thought generated by the sound. This system of having signifiers and signs resonated with me, especially when I connected it to the idea that art has a language.

Furthermore, Saussure asserts that the basic "two elements involved in the functioning of language are sound and ideas" (Saussure 111). Saussure's book, *Course In General Linguistics*, which was created posthumous from multiple sources, but mainly from Saussure's student's class notes, dedicates an entire chapter to the definition of language. Language "is not to be confused with human speech [language], of which it is only a definite part, though certainly an essential one. It is both a social

product of the faculty of speech and a collection of necessary conventions that have been adopted by a social body to permit individuals to exercise that faculty” (Saussure 9). Succinctly, a system of communication agreed upon by the social structure to represent ideas and objects. Language is also defined by Webster’s dictionary as: “b (1): audible, articulate, meaningful sound as produced by the action of the vocal organs (2): a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meaning” (Webster’s 672). How does this translate to a language for visual art? Are there conventional gestures? I hypothesized that if I, as a painter, had a language, as Saussure explains language, and then there must be a sign, a visual form, which would signify me and my work. I began looking at all my past work for commonalities. I discovered the frequent presence of a particular arch and parallel lines. I felt that these symbols in some way pointed me in the direction of a sign which signified me as a painter. This is how the series “Sign-Signifier” began.

My next series, *The Arab Spring*, came from my knowledge of the back story to Robert Motherwell’s series “*Elegy to the Spanish Republic*”. In 1948 Motherwell made the first work of this series and he continued painting more than 150 variants until his death in 1991. (Arnason 399) It is said that Motherwell became acquainted with the civil war in Spain while he was a student at Stanford University. Motherwell was directly impacted by the events through his associations with Roberto Matta and knowledge of the malfeasance being committed. He expressed this emotion through his painting of the first of many “*Elegy to the Spanish Republic*” in 1948. (Sarda)

In 2010, I had an experience involving the revolution in Egypt. It was a normal day and I came to my office and turned on my computer. As always, I first looked at the news. There in front of me was an image of a man holding the Egyptian flag splattered with what appeared to be blood. The more I read about what was going on the more emotional I became and tears started flowing. I was

overwhelmed with emotion for the courage and unity of the Egyptian people to rise up against oppression. Knowing the history of the Elegy Series, I decided to investigate through paint my reaction to the revolutions, later termed “The Arab Spring,” in hopes of finding a recurrent form, just as Motherwell had. This investigation continued until the end of my second year in the Master’s program. The form which continued to emerge was an oval, synonymous with a vaginal form. No other “form” emerged in my exploration. I explored this form with several variations; however none were successful in the expression of my feelings related to the Arab Spring. On the other hand, several successful paintings emerged out of my exploration of the Arab Spring. My Professor, Vanessa Mayoraz introduced me to a method of mind mapping, which allowed me to come to a better understanding of why I was so drawn to this event. I identified in a very personal way with the sense of liberation that the Egyptian people were feeling during the initial revolution. This is all explored in detail in Chapter II.

I took what I had learned from investigating the “Arab Spring” and applied that information to less traumatic events which occur on a daily basis; normal everyday happenings, which have caused me to feel excitement and joy. This is the basis for my thesis work: painting from felt experience, from dreams and everyday events. Just prior to beginning my thesis work I was introduced to John Dewey, the American educator and philosopher. Dewey investigates the idea that art comes from experience not just an experience but from *an* experience. This distinction of *an* experience was explained in Dewey’s book, *Art as Experience*. In a simplified form, it is having an encounter either in the making or the observation of something which leaves an impression one doesn’t easily forget.

After reading Dewey, I realized that I had had *an* experience in my reaction to the events in the Middle East. The feeling of having *an* experience, for me, is one of having a *veil* of continuity come over me, connecting me to the whole of the happening. This feeling of a *veil* dropping over me can best

be explained after a discussion of the word veil. The etymology of the word veil, when used as a noun, comes from Anglo-French c. 1200 to mean a “nun’s head covering,” also a “sail, a curtain.” The word veil can also be used a verb coming from Old French *veler*, *voiller* and from Latin *velare* “to cover, veil.” The figurative sense of “to conceal, mask, disguise” when used as a verb, coming from *velum* (Etymology). Additionally, Webster’s defines the word veil: 3: a concealing curtain or cover of cloth 4: something that hides or obscures 5: a covering body part or membrane a: *velum* b: *caul*. (Webster 1307). The comparable use with *velum* is more in line with how I think about the word in relation to my work. The veil is something that is present but see-through. It connects all the parts underneath into one piece. In many of my pieces the under layers are harsh and gaudy at times then I add the final layer, which obscures the gaudy creating a layer of calm and continuity.

The veil is also something that can be metaphorically related to an outward personality which gives the appearance of being tranquil and poised, but at the same time the person may have issues of anxiety, depression, or anger. The veil operates on both levels descending over me and connecting me to the wholeness of an experience and when translated into paint and surface, the final veil creates a continuity of surface and obscuring the harshness of underpainting while allowing pops of color to emerge.

Connecting with an event through the metaphor of a veil descending over me is how I identified the feeling of having an experience. My thesis work evolved from an initial exploration of linguistic theory followed by a reaction to the Arab Spring, arriving at a realization of the importance of my inner emotions as a basis for conceiving paintings.

CHAPTER 2

SIGN-SIGNIFIED

When I started my first semester of the Master's program, I was focused on the idea that painting had a language. I employed Saussure's theory of the system of language. Saussure theorized that language is the result of communication using a sound element which is combined with a psychological concept to form a unit thus producing an understanding of what was being communicated. Saussure explains: "It [language] is a system of signs in which the only essential thing is the union of meanings and sound-images, and in which both parts of the sign are psychological." (Saussure 15) Saussure has asserted that language is the result of a sound being perceived by the auditory center of the brain which then associates the sound with a concept familiar to the brain's repository of memory and ideas. This association creates an understanding of the sound which unites both the sound entity and the memory or idea. This concept is the basis of language according to Saussure. When applied to the frequently used metaphor that art is a language, I postulated that if painting has a language then my paintings had a language. Further, if a 'sign' is fundamental to language; a sign which is denoted by the combination of a concept [signified] and a sound-image [signifier] (or in painting's case a visual-image); then perhaps I could find a 'sign' for my painting. I felt it was important to know and understand a specific set of ideas and symbols that I could point to, a language of sorts, of my paintings. These notions instigated my research for the language of my paintings and a sign which would hold the concept and visual symbol for the same.

To begin the research into the language of my paintings I reviewed all my previous paintings. In doing so, I discovered something very interesting. Present in the majority of the paintings appeared either the presence of two parallel lines, or an arch, or both. I found this quite intriguing. I felt these

'symbols', the arch and the parallel lines may represent a portion of the 'sign', the combination of the concept and the 'sound image,' or in this case the 'visual image.' I formulated that by experimenting with combinations of the arch and the parallel lines I might be able to discover a 'sign' which would signify my language of painting.

I worked with the symbols, the arch and the parallel lines, until I arrived at a combination which felt right. However, once I found the right combination I also wanted to show the progression of the experiment. I decided to create six paintings displaying the development of the combinations. In all six paintings the arch appeared in the same position while the set of parallel lines marched across the space until one of those movements created the perfect sign. The third painting in the progression is the painting that exhibits a sign, created by the symbols of the arch and the parallel lines, which I felt could be a 'sign' for my paintings. (Figure 1)



(Figure 1. Sign-Signified, Oil and Copper Tape on panel. 2012)

The first consideration for creating this series was the surface area. This includes the dimensions and the surface itself. Brice Marden has said that he likes to work within restraints; a

specific space, a wall. He also uses number systems, such as four (4), meaning he uses a surface 8 x 4 feet or 4 x 16 (Marden video). Marden (b. 1938) graduated from the Yale School of Art in 1963. (Arnason 523) “During his career, Marden became a virtuoso in his ability to balance color, surface, and shape throughout an extended series of variation, developed within a set of purposeful restrictions.” (Arnason 523). Even with having these technical restrictions, Marden feels that his paintings are emotionally and spiritually evocative. He states:

The paintings are made in a highly subjective state within Spartan limitations. Within these strict confines, confines which I have painted myself into and intend to explore with no regrets. I try to give the viewer something to which he will react subjectively. I believe these highly emotional paintings not to be admired for any technical or intellectual reason but to be felt. [1963]” (Stiles 159)

Later in his career, after a trip to China, Marden began painting sinuous, meandering and continuous lines, playing color off of color, switching in and out of the surface area. I respect his use of technical devices while at the same time maintaining the search for feeling.

I appreciated the restrictions which Marden placed on himself. I myself prefer rectangles with the length to width ratio between 1.3 and 1.6. This is a comfortable space to work within and the space I used for this series. I plotted the images that I had been experimenting with on graph paper, and to scale for six, 18 x 24 inch surfaces. I decided that the progression I had chosen worked well in the space.

Once the form content was determined, the exploration in this series focused on the application of paint. I had always painted and scraped. However, this time was different. This time, I was applying the paint with a scraper not a brush. This new approach came from the influence of Gerhard Richter. I had not been very familiar with Richter’s work until I started graduate school. I was amazed at his ability to create such beautiful paintings with scraping and applying paint. I watched several videos of him painting and each one was as amazing as the other. This process of applying the paint

with the scraper was new to me. I had to improvise with my tools and found that sheetrock scrapers were perfect for the task. I also found that plexiglass worked well. I had a giant scraper created by adding handles to a four foot section of plexiglass. I would apply the paint to the scraper and then drag it across the surface of the panel. Variation in the pressure applied was another technique which produced fractures and intermingling of the colors and textures. A light pressure would leave a thin film of color allowing, for example, a red to mix with yellow creating a faint green in areas. A heavier pressure would allow more paint to be deposited on the surface and create a more opaque appearance. This also created smears of color combining with every pull of the scraper. The irregularities in the surface itself would cause the paint to jump from place to place creating blotches of color deposits and interesting patterns. The initial base color constantly reacts with the subsequent layers of colors creating thrilling color harmonies, such as reds complimenting greens and different tints of blue created with the interaction of white. These harmonies were impossible to obtain any other way. The colors interacted and coalesced into one surface, while expressing multiple interrelationships of color. I would continue this process until I had that feeling of recognition of a completed piece.

Initially in Sign-Signified series I had pre-planned the color palette, erroneously thinking I could force my intentions on the painting. However, paintings have a spirit of their own; a truth that pushes it way through to the surface. It was this truth that my intuition sensed when it inspired me to apply a strong red color. Initially the new color caused my conscious side to scream, 'This is not right', but I did it anyway. The red was harsh and seemed to obliterate the previous layers and their interactions. The more I work by applying new layers to appease the strong red color, the stronger the pieces became. The multiple layers interacting even in the smallest of areas provided richness I had not anticipated. The garish undercoats had given a depth to the paintings. I had seen Richter utilize bright primary colors for many of his initial layers, now I understood part of the process. I also noted that the

raw method of applying the paint with the scraper had created intense, raw and saturated areas of color interaction, which again is not something achievable with a brush. The final layer of a bluish white creates the veil of unity which pulls the whole piece together allowing the bright under colors to show through but not dominate. The veil is transparent enough in areas to allow for the blue to show through and opaque enough in other areas to create areas of shapes and forms.

Another part of my process was to work on all six pieces at once. This was important in order to maintain cohesion within the series. Even though each 18x24 surface was an independent piece, capable of standing alone, the pieces were created as a set and the color assisted in establishing that connectivity. If I started a layer of blue, then they all had to have that same layer of blue. The color is consistent but the forms, interactions and marks differ in each piece creating its uniqueness within the whole.

The paintings are each unique in their appearance; however at the same time they have a unity of color and mark which pulls them together creating one piece. The dominant color is a cobalt blue softened with underlying layers of white, red and yellow. These under layers pop through to the surface creating a dance of color controlled by the copper tape, which is used to form the arch and the parallel lines. The copper tape also collects the paint along its edges as the scraper pulls over it, creating distinctive patches of paint build-up. The eye sees the form initially and then explores the surface on an intimate level so as to experience the whole of the pieces. The entire piece provides a flip book effect of the parallel lines marching across the surface from start to dropping off completely in the last painting. This sign which has emerged is solidly my sign for this piece, but there was more to my painting than just this sign. I felt restricted and confined using this systematic approach. There had to be more to the understanding of painting as a language.

Continuing with my premise that art/painting has a language, it was becoming more apparent to

me that the strict adherence to a linguistic concept was too confining for any forward movement of my painting. I began researching “The Language of Art” and found many articles and discussions regarding the subject. One in particular was written by Mary Mothersill: “The phrase 'language of art',has been a commonplace in the literature of criticism for at least two hundred years. In the present century philosophers who have interested themselves in aesthetics often speak of art as if they supposed it to be a language. What is hard to find is any systematic attempt to make clear what it would be for art to be a language.” (Mothersill 559) This discussion was thought provoking and began leading me in a new direction of thinking regarding the language of art. Mothersill continues with an interesting citation of several philosophers who view art as a language, but she brings up a very good question, what are the definitions of art as a language? Is that even possible?

..... (1) Nothing can be asserted or denied in the language of art. A picture is at best analogous to a predicate. It can "convey information" on one and only one topic, namely how things look, and can do this only as a supplement to some ordinary language. (2) No one can learn the language of art unless he knows an ordinary language and unless, in addition, he is familiar with a set of conventions that prescribe conditions under which a picture is to be taken as representing or looking like some-thing. The importance one attaches to these differences will determine one's decision about whether the phrase 'the language of art' is or is not "more than a loose metaphor." That it is a metaphor seems certain, and I doubt that much is to be gained by following out the analogies between art and language: to the extent that they are obvious, they are uninformative. What is genuinely puzzling is the persistence of the metaphor and the-as it seems to me-mysterious fascination it continues to exert. (Mothersill 572).

Realizing that the question of whether art has a language is still very complex, I fully questioned my theoretical approach in the Sign-Signifier series. Art has to be more than a language, at least within the structuralist system that Saussure has proposed. As an artist I am trying to communicate something through my visual expressions of color and form, but the communication is not bound by the rigid guidelines of sign-signifier-signified. John Eger offers that “In creating art, consciously or not, artists are attempting to communicate at a powerful emotional level to those within their own culture. The best work transcends its cultural matrix and speaks directly to our common humanity.”(Eger). My theory of art as a language had to evolve. I arrived at a new understanding that the communication

CHAPTER 3

THE ARAB SPRING

I had redefined my idea of art as a language. I focused on the idea that human beings are connected through a collective consciousness, which is related to quantum theories and progressive thinking in the discipline of physics with the basic notion that energy between artist and viewer was not a language as defined by Saussure, but a communication on a different level of consciousness, which was stronger than a 'language' per se; whereas Jung talked about the collective unconscious and that it was inherent in all humans. (Jung 100) I felt there was also a collective consciousness which is ever-changing and evolving within the culture of the global humanity. Additionally, I was becoming more certain that this higher level of collective consciousness acted as an intricate web of communication which connects all human beings to each other. This revelation was further supported in an article by Donald Kuspit, in which he expounded on the psychic quality of art:

...In dream-and art-interpretation, the transgressive image is made social word. The visual is closer to the primal, and as such more sacred. In a sense, the deprivileging of the visual that occurs by regarding it linguistically amounts to a repression of its libidinous character of its so-called sensuality. (Kuspit 347).

For me, thinking of art as a language diminishes its potential as a communicator on a higher level of perception; a level of perception in which the viewer has an understanding without verbal clues from me or the art object. Art engages our emotions and our senses on a nonverbal level. I truly did not want to diminish art and especially not my art.

It is also about this time that I watched several videos of Gerhard Richter and as early as 1966 Richter stated:

To talk about painting is not only difficult but perhaps pointless, too. You can only express in words what words are capable of expressing- what language can express. Painting has

nothing to do with that; that includes the typical question, “What are you thinking of?” You can't think of anything. Painting is another form of thinking.” (Belz)

So, painting is another form of thinking, and the use of a structured system such as language to define the communication between an artist and their piece was becoming too formulaic for me. My work is more adapted to being a form of communication which traverses a different type of consciousness, a collective consciousness connecting to the viewer on a more ethereal and less defined level. There is something much more organic functioning here. This is the basis with which I wanted my paintings to operate. Even though I had found a signifying symbol with the series, it was not all encompassing for my work. The idea that there exists a collective consciousness which is accessible to all human beings , a consciousness which allows communication and connectivity between all who access it, lead me back to my emotional reaction to the events of January 2010 when the Egyptian people overthrew the existing government and revolution ensued. Somehow I felt a deep connection to this event, which inspired my next Series.

connects everything. Professor Richard Conn Henry states:

There is another benefit of seeing the world as quantum mechanical: someone who has learned to accept that nothing exists but observations is far ahead of peers who stumble through physics hoping to find out 'what things are'. If we can 'pull a Galileo,' and get people believing the truth, they will find physics a breeze. The Universe is immaterial — mental and spiritual. Live, and enjoy. (Henry 29).

I thought of my reaction to the Egyptian Revolution and began to ask questions. Why was I so moved by this event? I do not know anyone there. I have no Egyptian relatives on either side of my lineage. What was it that resonated in my soul for the Egyptian people? I thought about Motherwell and his reaction to the Spanish Civil war in his series "Elegy to the Spanish Republic." During his lifetime he created over 150 paintings in this series. An article by Elisabeth Goula Sarda sums up the experience:

At the time of the Spanish Civil War, Motherwell was a student at Stanford University and in his writings he mentions how deeply impressed he was with a lecture given in San Francisco by André Malraux as part of his American tour seeking support for the Spanish republicans.After his move to New York in 1940, Motherwell's contacts with people who had direct experience of the Spanish conflict intensified. Through Professor Meyer Schapiro, he met people from the Partisan Review who had been actively involved in supporting the Spanish republicans. Motherwell's friendship with the painter Roberto Matta was also particularly influential in deepening his involvement with the Civil War. his particular view of the Civil War, so marked by Lorca's murder, had a very direct effect on Motherwell. (Sarda).

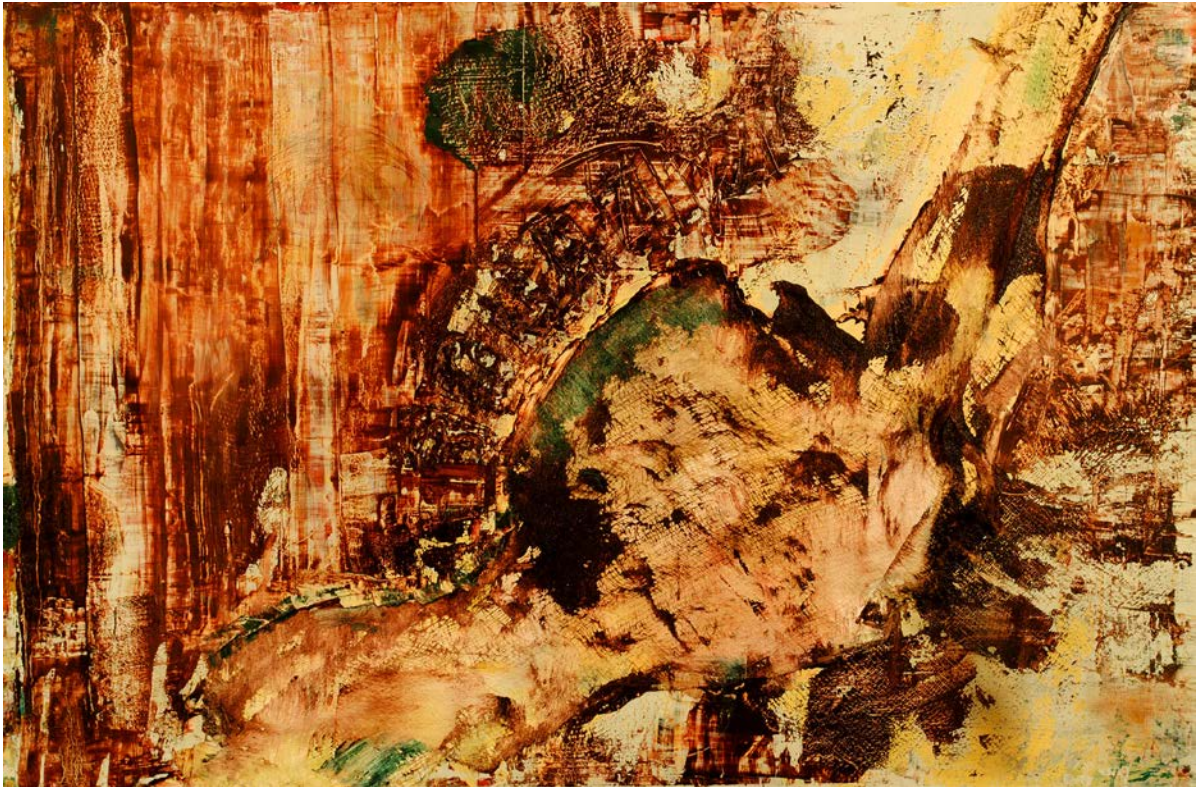
Motherwell's reaction to the Spanish Civil War seemed similar to my reaction to the Egyptian revolution. Through painting his experience of his reaction to this event, Motherwell discovered the iconic forms which appear in all the Elegy Series paintings. (Figure 2). When I first saw the forms, I perceived them to be very phallic in nature. Motherwell refutes this and insists that the forms evolved through his fixation on life and death. "Motherwell described the Elegies as his "private insistence that a terrible death happened that should not be forgot. But," he added, "The pictures are also general metaphors of the contrast between life and death, and their interrelation. " Motherwell also related the forms as displaying of the dead bull's testicles in the Spanish bullfighting ring. (MOMA 224).



(Figure 2. Elegy to the Spanish Republic No. 100, 1963-1975. Digital image © 2015 Museum Associates/LACMA Licensed by Art Resource, NY. Motherwell, Robert © VAGA, NY)

I decided to focus on my personal and emotional reaction to the Egyptian revolution and attempt to discover my own forms or symbols which could be representative of the emotions I felt in connection to this event.

I began researching the events in Egypt which revealed the enormity of the situation in the Middle East. There was not just one revolution in Egypt, but several in many countries of the Middle East. The actual beginning occurred in Tunisia when a young man named Mohammed Bouazzi, distraught from being denied a permit to sell goods in the market, set himself on fire. He later died of his devastating injuries. His actions launched a series of protest, which resulted in the resignation of the Tunisian ruler and the establishment of a new government. (Rodgers) “Bouazzi” became the motivation for one of my paintings in this series. I employed mixed media for this piece using surgical gauze as a part of the piece and painting on it, then soaking the gauze in lighter fluid and setting it on fire. This method was inspired solely by the facts of the events. The charred gauze mixed with the fleshy red paint was a reminder to me of the pain and agony he must have felt. Even in the days that followed and up until his death his wound care and the changing of the dressings must have caused horrific pain. (Figure 3)



(Figure 3. Bouazzi, Mixed Media on Panel 18 x 24)

The unrest and dissatisfaction with the ruling governments spread to the surrounding countries including Libya and Yemen. I watched videos of the events and found several phrases which impressed me, such as, “Spring forever,” “Our Eyes Are Weeping Blood,” “So Ugly It Is Beautiful,” and “Revolution.”(RT) These all inspired paintings bearing the titles from the phrases.

I painted with their faces in my mind. I painted seeing their unbridled joy as they won their revolutions. Each one of the paintings contains text referring to the titles. I felt the need for the text because it was so important to the ones involved. As I painted I kept trying to find the “forms,” like Motherwell had done, which would become an archetype for the experience. The only consistent form which would surface was an oval. It was vaginal in nature possibly speaking to me on a feminine level and any corresponding form that I put with it did not emblemize the events of the Arab Spring and my reaction to it.

During critiques I was asked, why I was painting this series. Why would an American woman with no connections personally to the Arab world be so affected by these events? This was something I had to explore and answer on my own. With the help of a process called “mind mapping” I was able to determine that I identified with the exhilaration of liberation. I had been married for eighteen years and had reached a point that I did not want to be married anymore. I had felt repressed and my sense of self had vanished. Because of these feelings and the fact that I was fully aware that I was setting an example for my three girls, I decided I had to do the hardest thing I had ever done in my life. I had to be on my own. I cannot explain the pain of separation. However, after the initial suffering, the sense of liberation was enormous, which was how I identified with the revolutionaries. I was an independent woman making my own decisions about everything. The enormous emotions of being free were powerful. I was so proud of the Egyptian people's courage and determination. I had found that within myself –the courage and determination to succeed at being liberated, even though I knew it would be a difficult journey for all involved.

In my paintings I focused on phrases that I had resonated with me from the conflict. The phrase “Spring Forever” was my first painting in the series. I had watched a video with young men spray painting the phrase on walls. (Figure 4).



(Figure 4. Image of Young Men Spray Painting Spring Forever on Wall.)

I began with the phase and then painted on top of the lettering. As with many of my paintings, there are times I think it is finished and several days later when I look at it I think it needs more. So it was with “Spring Forever”. At one point I was so frustrated with the process I literally wanted to burn it. This urge caused me to think about the Chinese-born artist CAI Guo-Qiang who created images with gun powder. I did not have gun powder at hand, but I did have lighter fluid. I had used the lighter fluid in the “Bouazzi” piece having been inspired by the fact that the young man Bouazzi had set himself on fire. In this instance I was using the lighter fluid as a technique to create a surface quality. I knew that lighter fluid was too weak to actually burn through material and that it would leave a residue, so I doused the surface with lighter fluid and ignited it. The results were astonishing and aesthetically pleasing. After a few more sessions of paint and lighter fluid the painting had reached that moment of recognition. (Figure 5)

I feel the painting, “Spring Forever,” reflects struggle and euphoria. The surface undulates with color and texture. The predominately golds and yellows give way to passages of translucent areas of

blue. The text of the title can be seen as if a ghost character appearing and disappearing on the surface. There are golden moments and dark moments of color and light. However, it all comes together and creates a whole. The veils of many thin layers of paint obscure the text but not totally and with close observation the text is readable.



(Figure 5. Spring Forever, Oil on Canvas, 3.5ft x 5.5ft. 2013)

For the Arab Spring series, there was no great philosophical treatise; there was only the sense of identification. The difficult part of the series was the death and destruction, which came with the revolution and then with the failing of the Egyptian regime. The more I learned, the more I realized how complicated the situation had been for centuries: Sunnis and Shi'is have a division that is generations old and neither accepts the other. In *The Modern Middle East-A History*, James Gelvin goes into great detail regarding the origins of the conflict between the factions in the region. He cited the Egyptian revolution as just another episode in the fight between the clerics and the military for power. Mr. Gelvin was proven right with the advent of the military coup, which is still in control to date. This prediction coming true did not give much hope for the future. In the final chapter of his book

he states:

What all this portends for the future of the Middle East is unclear. What is clear is that one should be wary of those who claim that all it will take to transform the region is the application of the right magic formula-- whether the ingredients of that formula are to be found in globalization, new technologies, or elections. And whatever policies the states of the region pursue, one other thing is clear as well: If modernity is defined by the dominance of the world economic and nation state systems, the Middle is firmly entrenched in its modern moment and there it is likely to stay. There does not appear to be a postmodern moment yet on the Middle Eastern horizon (Gelvin 326).

I had reached a point of saturation for the identification with liberation and the resulting decimation of the region. I felt it was time to move forward. I had discovered something new about myself, but the form I was looking for did not materialize for the use I had hoped for. I was hoping for a repeat of Motherwell's discovery, but instead I discovered a more intense way of painting. I was more than ready to change my focus to experiences which I have had through life and dreams; day to day experiences; life changing experiences would become the motivations for my next series of paintings.

CHAPTER 4

PAINTING AS A PROCESS OF THINKING

At this point, when I was developing my thesis show, the idea that painting has a language did not resonate with me any longer. The restrictions of sign, signifier, signified and symbol did not allow, for me, the possibility of communication on a non-linguistic level. The system suggested that the viewer would be dependent on my signs in order to respond, while I sought a more pure understanding of the whole piece, through the viewer's own experiences via perception, sensation and emotion. The exchange of information between the viewer and the art object constitutes a different process, one which involves emotions, cultural influences, recognition of something familiar, identification; this all constitutes a process of thinking. The viewer enters into a cognitive exchange between themselves and the experience the art object provides. This interaction on occasion will provide an experience in the sense that John Dewey describes:

“....we have an experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory....., [it] is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is an experience.” (Dewey 37)

As John Dewey would say, I had an experience when I felt that sense of identification with the revolutionaries in the Middle East, particularly the feeling of liberation. This process embedded in me the recognition of having an experience and I carried that lesson forward to my MFA series of paintings. My MFA thesis work is generated from specific events and dreams from my everyday life. These junctures, where emotion meets consummation inspires my paintings. The sensation of the event remains with me during the development of the piece, however at some point the emphasis shifts to an

interchange between color and mark making and my responses to those elements, while at the same time reflecting on the experience. As Dewey discusses I enter into a process of thinking:

Because perception of relationship between what is done and what is undergone constitutes the work of intelligence, and because the artist is controlled in the process of his work by his grasp of the connection between what he has already done and what he is to do next, the idea that the artist does not think as intently and penetratingly as a scientific inquirer is absurd. A painter must consciously undergo the effect of his every brush stroke or he will not be aware of what he is doing and where his work is going. Moreover, he has to see each particular connection of doing and undergoing in relation to the whole that he desires to produce. To apprehend such relations is to think, and is one of the most exacting modes of thought (Dewey 47).

It is also during this process of thinking that the relationship between what has caused me to begin the piece in the first place and the art object fuse. This coalescing of thought and action create an experience for me, the maker, in anticipation of translating the whole to the viewer.

I begin with the inspiration, which may be an event, a dream, an argument, a day dream, a moment in the sun; something that left an impression on me; caused me to have an experience; something which has left a profoundly complex and deep impression on me that I want to express through color and surface quality. Then I decide which colors I want to use in relation to the overall sensation. However, I do not have a set system for colors representing certain emotions or happenings. I am not necessarily using colors in association with the common use such as yellow for happy or caution; red for anger or passion. It is the combination of colors and their interaction with each other which moves me to use them.

In all but three of these paintings, I did not have a form or an object such as text or lines to respond to in the paintings. I simply begin with paint and color. My process for beginning is similar to Gerhard Richter. He describes: "In the beginning, one is completely free; it's almost irrelevant what is put there, and then a sort of picture comes about that usually looks quite stupid and has to be corrected until it looks better." (Richter 342-3). My own reactions of applying and subtracting paint are similar.

The early stages of the painting are garish at times, but I have a vision of how the layers will interact, within limitations. Sometimes the paintings take an altogether different path than I had envisioned, but that is the mystery of the translation and I trust it.

In several of these pieces I was influenced by the subject matter of Joan Mitchell, a painter from the early 1950's. I was particularly influenced by her passionate interpretation of nature. In one particular painting, entitled *Ici*, 1992, (Mitchell) which is French for “here,” her dramatic brush strokes of primary colors are at once singular in nature and then rapid marks in tight groupings create bouncing forms of color leaping from one end of the canvas to the other. The blues are so brilliantly blue while the compliment of yellow is toned with ocher and lemon yellow. The eye travels all over the surface following the lead of the rapid brush marks which blur with action. The viewing is exciting and calming at the same time. I feel spring in this painting, with its hints of lavender and touches of green, one can almost smell the fragrance. This may not have been her inspiration, but she had the ability to create an art object which translated an experience for me. Out of the sixty-five oil paintings on the Joan Mitchell Foundation’s website, twenty-four are untitled (Mitchell). In a review of an exhibit of Mitchell's work Joan Marter let the reader know that “....the general impression of Mitchell as a tough, outspoken woman, though one who could be surprisingly reticent when asked to discuss her art” (Marter 57). I understand not wanting to title a painting. In one way you are telling the viewer what to think about the painting and I want viewer to come to their own conclusions. I do not want to impose on the viewer what experience they should have. I want the relationship between the viewer and the painting to happen independently and I feel it will be unique for each and every individual. The viewer may have a totally different translation than the motivation for my painting the piece and for me that is acceptable. Richter responded accordingly when asked by Stefan Koldehoff, “Do you think it’s okay when people interpret something into your abstract paintings?” Richter responded: “The paintings only work because of people's desire to see something in them. Every aspect of them resembles something

that's real, but the similarity only goes so far..... The fact that paintings come to life through this strange mechanism isn't appreciated nearly enough. Paintings present us with similarities that we attempt to categorize. They always remind us of something – otherwise they wouldn't be paintings” (Richter 352-3). It is intellectually interesting to know the back story to paintings, why they painted and what inspired the artist, but it shouldn't be the reason for an experience with the painting. Theodor Adorno suggests that comprehending art is enigmatic:

Art is mediated in spirit – the element of rationality – in that it produces its enigmas mimetically, just as spirit devises enigmas, but without being capable of providing the solution; it is in art's enigmaticalness, not in its meanings, that spirit is manifest. (Adorno 127)

Adorno is saying that motivation for art comes through spirit and that inspiration at the same time is a puzzle. There is not one way to express the truth being revealed through the spirit. I utilize the physical properties of color, scraping, pulling paint across the surface to mimic and translate, the puzzle as I receive it, by responding with the tools I know. There is no solving the puzzle for it is in the trying to solve it that the spirit is recognized. I want to create that spirit in my paintings. I believe that it is this energy, spirit, which is translated to the viewer through their own means of communication and interpretation. Adorno explains: “The spirit of artworks is not in their meaning and not their intentions, but rather their truth content, or, in other words, the truth that is revealed through them.” (Adorno 284) I feel that this truth, whatever it may be, will be revealed differently to every viewer. Each person will interpret the colors, forms and textures in an independent manner influenced by their own cognitive function and cultural experiences. In many of my paintings there is so much going on underneath the final layer which creates that veil of tranquility. The veil doesn't totally hide what is going on underneath it but creates a sense of oneness from the furry.

Truth of an experience is what I wanted to convey in the first painting of this series. This truth being how I felt during and after the experience; how I processed the information given to me. The motivation for this painting came on a warm summer's day while I was sitting on the back porch

watching the bluebirds fly in and out of their bluebird house. I caught flashes of their intense blue color and then they were gone. It was also during this time that the goldfinches were migrating through and several had descended upon the bird feeder. The goldfinches have a brilliant yellow plumage with contrasting black markings on their head, wings, and tails. The goldfinches were flying in and out from the feeder flashing their color capriciously around the yard. The display of so much color caused my senses to be hyper-focused and lucid. I wanted to take a picture, but I simultaneously realized that a photograph would not do this event justice. As I continued to watch the scene, a feeling that I can best describe as a veil of continuity, a feeling of truth in an experience, came over me. I wasn't just watching the blue birds and then the gold finches; I was part of it. This feeling of cohesion stayed with me and I knew I had to paint what I had just witnessed.

I began with drawing to help me find the aesthetic placement of the shapes, which I wanted to include. Once I found that placement I began the piece. I wanted the shape of the birds to emerge, but not be distinct, once I painted the foundation color I taped off the shapes. I felt the urge to use copper tape as an element to reflect the glimmering light and the color, which was happening that day. I began to paint the colors as I remembered them, the vivid cadmium yellow with hits of black markings, the brilliant blues popping in and out of sight, the blue sky hovering over it all. (Figure 6)



(Figure 6. My Blue Bird Experience. Oil and Copper Tape on Panel. 18 x 24 in.)

I built several layers of color through applying and then scraping, anticipating the smearing and the coincidental color combinations happening under my hand. It was like having another new experience. Then comes that moment of recognition in which I knew I needed that last layer to make the piece whole, provide the continuity, the veil of inclusion. This last layer unites all the flashes of color into one piece. It was at this point that I removed the tape from the shapes and the initial blue layer popped through while remaining one with the piece. When I look at the piece I can still feel the sun on my face, hear the chirping of the birds, feel that veil of continuity come over me as I experience the wholeness of the event and not just a goldfinch then a bluebird, then the blue sky, then the occasional cardinal, but everything all at once, in unison; a wholeness which contains a truth of experience. That feeling of connectedness creates an excitement that is hard to contain. This feeling was so refreshing compared to the feelings I was immersed in with the Arab Spring series. I was now having a special beginning of my own, my own spring of experience. And it was that feeling that I

wanted to repeat in the forthcoming paintings.

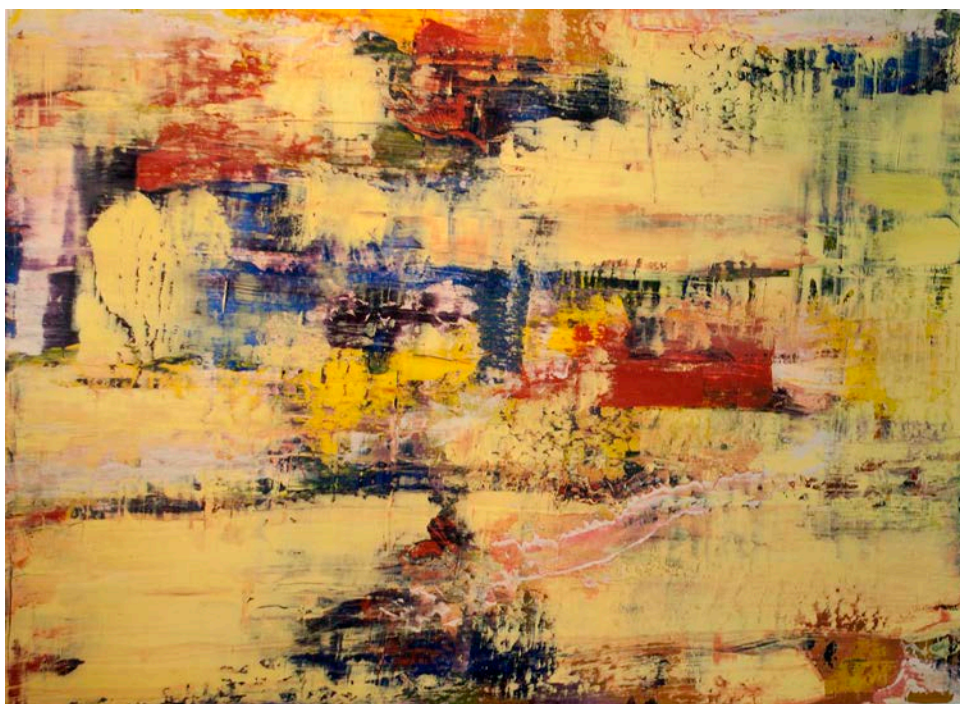
The next set of paintings represented a turning point in my painting practice. To initiate the following paintings I did not use a form, a shape or a line of any kind. I simply choose my surface 4ft. x 3ft. and I pondered on the experience, then I chose my initial colors and I started. There was no form to work off or to consider. There was only the engagement of surface and paint. In this painting I was sharing my experience of the magnificent fall colors in the area and I just painted what I was seeing and feeling. I went on a color cruise; riding through the mountains and taking in the vistas of color, the smell of leaves, the solid blue sky and the pinch of cold. The colors I chose collided in harmony with golden yellows, and burning reds, softened by sky blues and accidental greens. The scraper in my hand created mysterious passages of intense saturation until I had that moment of recognition when it was complete. I could sense the truth of the experience in the object. I wasn't just painting I was creating a space of experience. John Graham once said: "The difficulty in creating a work of art lies in the fact that artist has to unite at one and the same time three elements: thought, feeling, and automatic 'écriture'" (Friedman 50) (Figure 7). It is my hope that viewing this painting gives one a sense of warmth, from the overall covering of light yellow mixed with more ochre yellow, eyes moving from one corner to the next resting on the burning reds and subtle blues, then being carried back and forth between the poignant whites mixing with the yellows. There is a sense of excitement and energy traveling up and down settling on an area of burning intense red which appears as if it is melting into the surface. The autumn reds advance forward from the lower layers to play with the yellows and whites; all being pushed by an unseen force in a diagonal direction across the surface.



(Figure 7. October. Oil on Panel. 4ft. x 3ft. 2014)

Continuing with my personal experiences, my next painting focused on the feeling of joy and happiness. I deliberately wanted to paint these emotions because I had had enough of the feeling of death and destruction. I listed several events in my life which I thought had provided me with the feelings of happiness and joy. They were intensely personal events: the birth of my children, making love, the glory of Easter Mass, being accepted into art school, and the smell of daffodils. The colors came intuitively consisting of soft yellows, intense blues and reds. I applied the paint to the panel pulling it across the surface creating textures and ripples. Each new layer covered the last layer while at the same time uncovered combinations of color which were erotic and passionate. Applying the paint with the scraper automatically created unintentional marks and textures, which I find so much more pleasing than the marks created with the brush alone. The marks had action and confidence while at the same time there was peacefulness in holding it in my sight. It reminded me of sitting in the Rothko

room at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., but it was different than that; my painting contained numerous moments of tingling excitement and exhilaration transitioning to moments of quiet contemplation. It was more like experiencing a Pollock. Robert Coates once wrote of Pollock in the New Yorker: “The main thing one gets from his work is an impression of tremendous energy, expressed in huge blobs of color alternating with lacing and interlacing of fine lines. Recognizable symbols are almost nonexistent, and he attempts to create by sheer color and movement the mood or atmosphere he wants to convey.” (Friedman 117). As does Pollock, so do I attempt to convey by sheer color and movement the atmosphere of happiness and a joyous day. (Figure 8)



(Figure 8. Joyous Day. Oil on Panel. 4ft x 3ft.2014)

Included in this series is a set of large paintings, 4ft. x 6ft. One is predominately white and one is predominately black. They were born out of the idea of secrets. We all have secrets that no one knows but ourselves. My plan was to collect other people's secrets as well as my own and write them on the first layer, finishing the painting then having the voices of the people telling their secrets playing when the paintings were exhibited. This was during a time when I was searching for a bridge from the

ravages of war to the life that surrounded me. However, after spending two days collecting secrets on recordings my instructor and I decided that the voices were too recognizable and it would not be ethical to play the secrets when someone might unintentionally be recognized. This narrowed the secrets down to me. So I wrote all my secrets on the surface, some over and over. It was cathartic to see my secrets in such a public space. I quickly started painting over the writing with layer after layer of bold primary colors which I wanted to show through to the last uniting layer. (Figure 9)



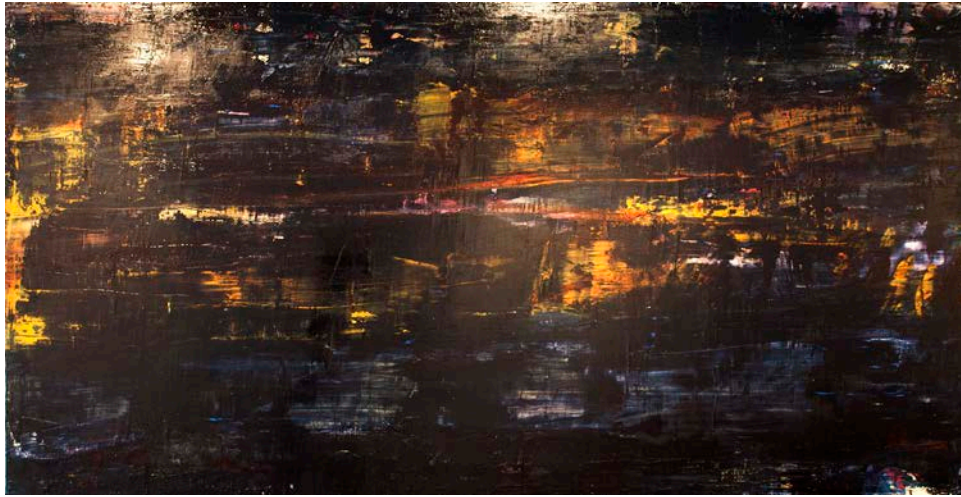
(Figure 9. And It Happened Just Like That. Oil on Panel. 4ft. x 6ft.)

The white painting happened with a much uncomplicated efficiency. The final product contains skeins of blue, yellow and red running underneath the surface popping out here and there giving a sense of play while enticing one to look closer at what is under the veil of white covering the surface. If one looks long enough you can see letters, impressions of words, ghosts of secrets well kept. The sense I have is that if one could just pick an edge and pull the veil away, she/he could see the whole. The utilization of the veil in this painting unites the surface creating a sense of serenity while metaphorically shielding the viewer from the rapid mark making and raw color combinations.

The black painting is anything but black. It started the same way with lines and lines of secrets,

some good some bad, some unthinkable. Again, that feeling of nakedness overtook me and I quickly added bold primary colors to hide the secrets from anyone's eyes but mine. Time and time again I added a layer thinking it was the last, but to no avail. The painting and I were arguing. The painting wanted to show its crudeness. I wanted a smooth luminous surface. We fought. The process became an exchange of color and surface; a call and response connection. I would add a rich layer of crimson and the painting would yell for blue. I would add a layer of blue and it would shout for white. I obeyed and put down the white, knowing I was going to cover it in the end with a deep rich navy blue, almost black. For months this discussion continued, I would apply what I thought would be that last layer of deep dark blue and the painting would sneer and spit. Even in critique my professor would say, "It's not resolved," when I was ready to be done with it.

In the end we compromised. I mixed a rich yellow composed of ocher, lemon yellow, and cadmium yellow. I scraped it on with the largest scraper I had so that the mark traversed the entire surface. I added some white and crimson with a brush, and then I waited. The painting was resting and during its deepest sleep I mixed a luxurious navy blue and added it in strategic moments. After months of conflict, this time the painting complied. It was as if it just finally gave in to my demands. That is why I call it, "Poor Tortured Soul." (Figure 10)



(Figure 10. Poor Tortured Soul. Oil on Panel. 4ft. x 6 ft. 2015)

The final piece has scars and marks from layers of argument. There are wounds of red and yellow showing through to the surface, without scabs. Brilliant blues peak out here and there. Evidence of the swath of yellow ocher ripples across the surface, while the rich navy blue envelops all the colors and shrouds the piece as if trying to heal it. The piece has evidence of a great history. Again, the final veil of the navy blue united the surface providing a sense of quiet in the night and allowing the history to reveal itself in poignant places.

In conjunction with the two large paintings I created four small paintings for each one. All are 11 x 14 inches. The four that go with the large black painting (Figure 11) have the same color combinations, beginning with primary colors and ending with an all-encompassing layer of deep blue. They have moments of soft whites and shining yellows coming through to the surface. They were much more compliant with the process than the larger one.



(Figure 11. Little Moments. Oil on Canvas. 11in. x 14in. 2014)

The four small paintings which go with the large white painting have a long history of texture and marks creating a mystery of their own as to what they are holding deep within the recesses of their interior structure. The evidence was then layered with a final cerement of white, which is apropos because before the layer of white the paintings felt dead. With the layer of white they became what they couldn't be before. They hold a mystery of being created by their history of texture and color. The pale and muted colors leaked through the white over-painting like flesh with occasional reds or blues; quite the resurrection. The distinctive forms created with the use of the scraper identify one from the other. This resurrection process was used on a few other paintings which had a great history and exciting marks worthy of retention; adding the last layer of white gave them a second chance. (Figure 12)



(Figure 12. History Veiled. Oil on Canvas. 11in. x 14in. 2015)

While battling with the large black painting I worked on some smaller pieces, 18 x 24 inches. The first two came from a dream. The dream was not pleasant and had people from my past weaving in and out of the subject matter. I wanted these people to be out of my dreams. So, I decided to paint them out. I started with colors which I associated with certain people. I covered these colors with a blue-black, more black than blue, using Paynes Grey. The next layer I painted with a brush, putting down softer colors of white and a flesh color to counter act the negativity of the underlying intentions. The marks were made intuitively and quickly. The first one has a sweeping mark of white arching over the top of the surface and a similar brush stroke bowing in the opposite direction on the bottom creating a space between where red skips along in random places. (Figure 13) The resulting piece has a sense of traveling. The wide yellow ochre swath moves from left to right with its surface fragmented by the dark underpainting. The white marks maneuver from the top and bottom corners complimenting one another in an approach to the center on the other side. Blues merge with white and yellow throughout the

surface area pushing forward in the piece while muted yellows and pinks are sinking back into a dark abyss. As a whole there is a sense of what once was and what is coming.

The second piece has a large swath of yellow ochre covering the top third of the dark surface complimented by a sash of white rippling through the bottom portion. Instinctively I whipped a broken circle of red resting in the center of the piece connecting the two together. The movement of the red line is rapid and light, but significant. (Figure 14) The initial layer of brooding darkness is smothered by the bright yellow layer which undulates across the entire surface leaving pulsating areas of the dark pushing through. The various passages of red highlight the upper left corner and pull the eye down to the mid left bottom, quickly moving back to the center with the rapid movement of an almost calligraphy-ish shape. The white slinks from the left lower corner invading the space, dropping slivers of itself across the center. There is a sense of movement from left to right, stabilized by the yellow and interrupted by the darkness from below.

My plan was to paint over all the surfaces again, but during a critique the overall consensus was to leave them just as they were, raw and exposed, no veils, no shrouds of concealment, just naked.



(Figure 13. Naked No. 1. Oil on Panel. 18in x 24in.)

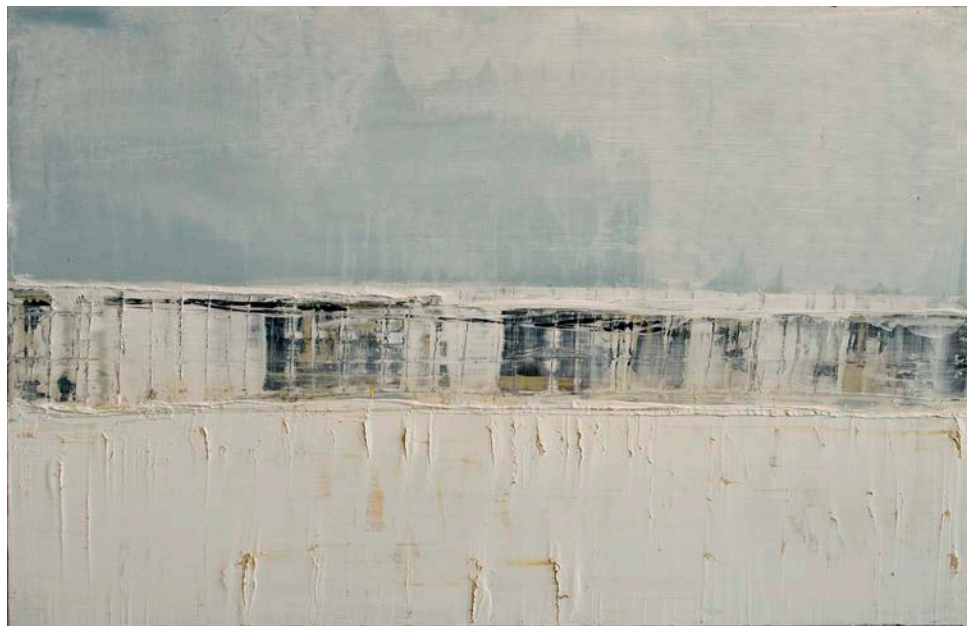


(Figure 14. Naked No. 2. Oil on Panel. 18in. x 24in.)

The next pieces of my MFA thesis work consist of two paintings 18 x 24 inches, which originated from the memorable experience of traveling across country in order to move my daughter to Colorado. We left Tennessee New Years Eve of 2010 and arrived in the small town of Granby, Colorado on January 1, 2011. We traveled through Kansas and Nebraska, the flat lands. The country side was covered in snow and the skies were baby blue. Every now and then I could see a fence line or a cow and occasionally a few horses. I wasn't driving so I was able to take pictures of this foreign landscape, blurred by the speed of the car and the blowing snow, it was magical. The blue met the white creating a line crisp yet soft at the same time, fluctuating back and forth between separate and fused. Elements of the fence lines provided a contrast of darkness operating with the same fluctuation of being and not being. Then there was the golden yellow of grain reeds not harvested poking through the heavy layer of white snow. This is what I painted. The paintings are inspired by the landscapes but they are not landscapes. They are impressions of a magical experience derived from seeing sights I had never seen before. (Figure 15, 16)



(Figure 15. Foreign No. 1. Oil on Panel. 18in. x 24in. 2015.)



(Figure 16. Foreign No. 2. Oil on Panel. 18in. x 24in. 2015.)

The colors of the paintings resemble the landscape. I mixed a soft cerulean blue with white and painted the first layer. I then mixed zinc white and titanium white with a touch of silver and painted the lower portion of the surface. In the center, a little off center, I created some contrasting lines of

grey-black creating a strip, which reminded me of Barrett Newman's Strip Paintings. Again, I covered the entire lower half, including the strip with white to create the combinations of colors which only come with scraping. I added sprinkles of golden yellow across the bottom and layered with white again. Lastly, I washed the upper blue portion with a thin layer of white, symbolic of the blowing snow. In all practicality the paintings are landscapes, but as I said before they do not have to be. They could be hung vertically and be a strip painting. For me they are an expression of an experience translated through paint. As Adorno would say, they hold a truth that is originated in spirit not in landscapes.

The last piece of my MFA thesis work that I will talk about came from a dream. I literally dreamed I was looking at this painting and remember distinctly thinking in my dream, 'what a beautiful combination of color. That orange is so soft and compliments that blue so uniquely.' When I awoke from the dream, I spent the day in the studio replicating that painting. The surface area is large, 4ft.x 3ft. I mixed the blue constantly referring to the image in the dream. That was the first layer. Then I mixed the orange. Orange is not a color I use very often, so mixing it was a challenge, especially to get the exact orange I remembered from the dream. It took a while, but I finally got what I was looking for. I loaded up the scraper and laid down the orange in the same locations which I had seen in the dream, dominating the right side of the painting with some free floating marks in the upper left hand corner. The placement of the orange mainly to the right was directed by the dream, but the random marks of orange to the left top and bottom left were pleasant accidents of the scraper running out of paint. I had no idea how many layers this painting would need to satisfy me that I had re-created the one from the dream. The next layer consisted of more blue. I mixed an almost similar color to the first layer, but it was a shade darker. I lathered up the scraper and pulled it across the surface when I had finished I literally started crying because it was so beautiful to me. It was that moment of pure recognition of the truth of what I had dreamed. What amazed me more was that I was finished after three layers. The combinations of blues create openness at the center, while the mantles of orange lock

the passages in place, creating a space with a sense of depth as is looking into the sky in springtime. For me, the painting was straight forward and bold. It did not have multiple areas of working over to achieve the feeling from the dream. It was less veiled than the previous ones. There is not a final layer to unite the piece. It is united through the compliments of orange and blue which are perfectly balanced within the surface. It was a present from the universe. (Figure 17)



(Figure 17. A Gift From the Universe. Oil on Panel. 3ft. x 4ft. 2015)

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

I paint from the interior of my being. I paint from experiences, memories, and dreams. Jackson Pollock said the same thing his way: “The thing that interest me is that today painters do not have to go to a subject matter outside of themselves. Most Modern painters work from a different source. They work from within” (Friedman 175). The interior inspiration is not always perfectly clear or specific. The idea is metaphorically like that of a larva. In the beginning it knows what it wants to become, but it is not anywhere close to that. It takes layers and layers to turn the larva into the beautiful and exciting butterfly of a painting. When that moment of recognition is felt, the creation of an experience, then there is hope that the truth of the experience is translated through the tenuous relationship between the viewer and the art object. It is not through language, utilizing signs, signifiers, or symbols that this translation occurs it is through the spirit which Adorno talks about. It is this spirit that connects us humans to one another and it is this spirit that I hope to connect to through my work. This spirit is, for me, accessed not by way of language but by the act of painting, which has shown itself to be a process of thinking through making. It is this spirit that descends on me creating a veil of knowing, a veil of continuity with the whole. Even in the literal sense the final veil of paint creates a unity using the verb of veil to obscure and smudge imperfections into a completed painting. Gerhard Richter once said, “The smudging makes the paintings a bit more complete. When they’re not blurred, so many details seem wrong, and the whole thing is wrong too. Then smudging can help make the painting invincible, surreal, more enigmatic” (Richter 368). The veil can function the same way. Many times it makes the painting invincible, other times a puzzle. At many stages the underpainting looks so wrong, but I know that the combinations will merge as perfectly placed with the cascade of the final veil.

I see my dense layered paintings as beckoning the viewer in for a closer look and push her/him back just enough to see the whole. The viewer must gather all the information of color, texture and

form and then through their own process of thinking react. I know that everyone will interact differently with my work. It is not my desire to impose my inspiration or motivation for the paintings on the viewer. I want the viewer to communicate with the piece in their own way. Lee Krazner once said: “Jackson used to give his pictures conventional titles.....but now he simply numbers them. Numbers are neutral. They make people look at a picture for what it is – pure painting.” (Friedman 157)

Pure painting is how I see my work: the use of an ancient medium to express emotions, ideas, experiences and dreams without dependence on signs, symbols, or representation. My work represents collaboration between the spirit, which Adorno speaks of, me and the viewer, hopefully, transmitting the truth of the experience through the process of thinking and pure painting.

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